four quarters

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The Man Who Beat Ernie Leavitt

• J. F. Hopkins

They had a few beers with the rooters who had come over from Philadelphia. Joe Flaherty, Bernie's corner man, would have preferred skipping the whole thing and returning to Philadelphia immediately, once the doctor said Bernie was O.K., which he did. But Bernie wanted to see the guys, and Joe Flaherty didn't object. There was a lot of talk about a return bout. "You'll get him next time, kid." "You sure made him look bad through the first five." "Bernie, you showed these New York wise guys a thing or two. You'll be back." Joe Flaherty didn't join the talk. He didn't think Bernie would be back. Not in the windup at the Garden.

The kid was laughing at something. Laughing. Joe Flaherty wasn't laughing. Someone said, "Cheer up, Joe. You're taking this harder than Bernie." Joe Flaherty grunted.

He finally got the kid out of the bar. They could never have broken away from the gang if Bernie had won or even if he had lost on a close decision. But he had been knocked out, and nobody really insisted that he make a night of it.

"Well, I blew the big one," Bernie Kernan said. They were driving across the turnpike, in Joe Flaherty's Chevy. He was unmarked. You wouldn't have guessed that he had been in a fight. He hadn't taken much of a beating. The knockout came in the sixth. Everybody at ringside had Bernie well ahead on points when the Mexican boy caught him flush on the jaw with a right and scored a knockdown. Bernie got up at eight. You knew he was going down again and wouldn't get up a second time. He had nothing left. His hands weren't even up. The referee should probably have stopped it right then and there, but Bernie, until he caught that one punch, hadn't been in the slightest trouble and the referee let the fight go on. The Mexican put him down again almost immediately and Bernie didn't stir.

"Why did I have to blow the big one?"

"Forget it," said Joe Flaherty.

"How can I forget it?"

"I mean stop talking about it. It's over. Done."

"That bastard Freddie didn't even come in the dressing room."

They drove in silence until Bernie asked: "Do you think I ought to jack up?"

"Let's not talk about it now. Let's wait a couple of days."

"I bet Freddie dropped a bundle."

For the first time Joe noticed that Bernie was smoking.

"When did you get the cigarettes?" asked Joe.

"What's it to you? Back at the bar."

"You haven't been fooling Freddie. You think he's dumb, but he's not so dumb."

"You mean I wouldn't have stopped that right if I hadn't smoked a couple cigarettes the last two weeks?"

"That's not all you did."

"I was in shape. I was never in better shape."

"Bernie, it's not too late. But you got to make up your mind. Either you're gonna be a fighter or you're not gonna be a fighter."

"So I lose one. I win twenty-four in a row. That's not being a fighter?"

"When I was your age, I didn't smoke, I didn't drink, I didn't run around—"

"You never even got to the Garden, did you? Even in a prelim?"

In his anger, Joe Flaherty found himself clenching the wheel. He extended his fingers, took a deep breath and slowly expelled it, cutting the speed of the car as he did so.

"— I know you were good," said Bernie. "A lot of the guys told me."

"I never had your natural ability. I never said I did. But I never had your chance either."

"The — war."

Joe didn't know whether the kid meant it or not. Maybe he was being sarcastic. In any event, it was better not to answer him. It was no night for an argument.

"You working tomorrow?" asked Bernie.

"It's tomorrow already. No, I'm signed off."

Didn't the kid remember? They would have had a swell day in New York if he had won. But why remind him of that.

They came in over the Walt Whitman bridge and Joe dropped Bernie off at his row home in Southwest Philadelphia. When he got to his own home, which, like Bernie's, was a row home, but in the suburbs, he noticed that while Martha had left on only the outside light and the small lamp by the living room window, Clay Dieckhaus, next door, must still be up. For a second he was tempted to go over and tap on Clay's window, but he decided the hell with it and as quietly as he could he let himself in. He hoped he was right in thinking that Martha had gone to bed. He threw his hat, scarf, and overcoat on the sofa. But when he returned from the kitchen with a bottle of beer, he retrieved them and put them where they belonged, in the closet.

There was a light knock at the door and he let in Clay, who was in pajamas and a bathrobe.

"What the hell are you doing up?" asked Joe. "A man who's gotta get up in the morning when you do."

"I couldn't sleep. I knew you wouldn't rush off to bed."

"You're right about that. I'll get you a beer."

Neither used a glass. They used glasses only in drinking draught beer at the neighborhood taproom.

"He looked good, up until the end," said Clay. "We watched in here, with Martha."

Joe didn't answer.

"You don't want to talk about it?" asked Clay.

"Don't mind me. There's a lot of guys I wouldn't want to talk about it with. But you I don't mind."

"He looked so good—moving around, in and out. He was giving that Spik a boxing lesson."

Clay, unlike Joe, looked up at the sound of Martha on the stairs. She wore a long robe over her nightgown, and her hair was in curlers. She was a very slight girl with prominent cheekbones.

"What happened?" asked Martha. She stood at the foot of the stairs.

"He got hit," said Joe. "Want a beer?"

She shook her head.

"Is he all right? Did he get hurt?"

"He's fine. His old man and him

will be out hunting the day after tomorrow while Clay and me are working, and everything will be just great."

She shuddered. "It was terrible to see him standing there. Helpless."

"A glass jaw. That's what those newspaper bastards will say."

"Is that the trouble, Joe?" asked Clay. He was mild and deferential. "That he can't take a punch?"

"I don't know. So he doesn't have the toughest chin in the world. The cigarettes didn't help any. And drinking beer in the goddam Legion. Staying out to all hours. Damn, crazy kid."

"Did you see Freddie after the fight?" asked Clay.

Joe would have said '— Freddie' except that Martha was present. There were expressions that he never used in his wife's presence. He was proud of that fact, just as he was proud of the fact that he was the first member of his family to be a high school graduate. He had been among the better students in the parish elementary school. In high school he slipped a bit but nevertheless finished in the upper half of his class. His happiest school memories were of grade school.

"I saw him," said Joe, "but not to speak to. I wasn't looking for him and he wasn't looking for me."

"Maybe he moved Bernie up too fast," Clay suggested.

"Too fast? After twenty-four fights? He should have fought that Mexican a year ago."

"You mean he could've beat him a year ago?"

"No, I don't mean that. I mean he could have learned one way or the other. Either he belonged in there with guys in the top ten or he didn't. If he didn't—" Joe shrugged. "There's worse ways to make a living than driving a truck."

"We saw you real good one time," said Martha. "Didn't we, Clay?"

"It was a close-up," said Clay, "between rounds."

"You were telling Bernie what to do."

"I guess I forgot to tell him before that last round."

Clay smiled faintly, but Joe, sunk in the easy chair, was unsmiling and looking at neither him nor Martha.

"Can I get you something to eat?" asked Martha. "Suppose I put on bacon and eggs?"

"You can get us two more beers." He was thinking that if he wanted bacon and eggs he would cook them himself, as he always did after Sunday Mass. He was a better cook than she.

When Martha was in the kitchen, Clay said, "I'm sorry I never saw you fight, Joe."

Joe laughed sourly. "I never made the Garden, not even in a prelim."

"Well, circumstances and all. Still, national champion in the amateurs. That's something. Who was that one guy you beat who went places in the pros?"

"Ernie Leavitt."

"Hell, I heard of him long before I moved here."

"It was one hell of a fight. I was never better than I was that night."

"I remember reading about it. The time you loaned me your scrapbook."

Martha returned with the beers.

"You should have heard Monica yell when she saw you on the television. 'There's Daddy! There's Daddy!' You could have heard her a mile away."

"Why did you let them stay up?"

"Only Monica. The other two were in bed."

"I'll know it in the morning," said Clay. "I'm not used to this night owl stuff."

"You ought to take a couple lessons from Bernie."

"Not at my age. Can't do it."

"Neither can he."

"Maybe this will teach him a lesson."

"Not him." His voice was barely audible.

Clay stood at the door uncomfortably. "Well, Joe, all I can say is I'm sorry it went like it did."

Joe waved him goodnight.

"Why don't you come to bed?" asked Martha. "Don't you think you'd sleep?"

"I can sleep all morning."

"I'm sleepy. Come on. Go to bed."

"I didn't ask you to come down here. You go to bed."

"Don't act like that. It's not my fault he lost."

"At last. Something we can agree on. You're right. It's not your fault he lost."

"I hope you're in a better humor when you get up in the morning." She padded up the stairs in her bedroom slippers.

Joe Flaherty sat and drank beer until daybreak. There was only the current bottle at his side. When he emptied one, he returned to the kitchen with it, rinsed it out, and placed it in the case of empties. With the light of morning coming through the Venetian blinds, he dozed off. But only briefly. When he heard Martha's foot on the stairs, he stirred. He was glad that he had heard her. He didn't want her to find him asleep. As she came down the stairs, he caught the sickening odor coming from Clay's cigarette butts. It was an odor he particularly detested. The cigarette smoke clogging the small clubs in which he had fought was the worst of the few unpleasant memories he had of his own career. He used to throw up after every fight, and he always blamed it on the cigarette smoke.

"Empty that damn ash tray, will you."

Martha was still in her bed clothes.

"What did you accomplish by staying up all night?"

"I was trying to get drunk but I didn't succeed."

"Do you want me to get the paper? Betty's will be open in twenty minutes."

"If there's one thing I don't want to see, it's a newspaper. The bastards."

"Can I get you some breakfast? Or would you rather go up and get some sleep?'"

"I'll go to bed," he mumbled. He handed her the remaining bottle and went upstairs.

He undressed in their bedroom. He was now quite tired, but habit still dictated his behavior. Jacket and pants were neatly hung up, shirt and socks dropped into the dirty clothes hamper. He even placed his tie on the metal rack fastened to the inside of the closet door.

Before he got in bed, he stood before the mirror in his T-shirt and shorts. He struck the boxer's pose. He discounted the gray hair. Hell, it was premature. He was only forty and he had been in his twenties when his hair started turning gray. The extra pounds in his gut told more than his gray hair. He wasn't a lightweight anymore. Still, he looked pretty good, for a guy who drank as much beer as he did. He dropped his hands and got into bed, but not before making a quick sign of the cross.

Kernan would never make it. No use pretending that he would. The lesser dream belonged with the big one now, both cold, both dead.

What would have come of it? That time after the War, he should have gone through with it, the plan to go to the West Coast and fight under a different name, Martha thinking he was out there on a construction job. What would have come of it? At least Kernan hadn't been beaten by a woman.

The long night caught up to him and he fell asleep, jumping about the ring as he did so, his arms raised in triumph.

Real Saints

• **Robert Bloom**

Real saints glow in the dark,
bathe in their own auras,
and are apt to bleed when stuck.

Angered beyond reason, they lurk
in the shadow of running amuck,
or rampage among floras

they normally browse in, bruise
those petals and daisies for luck.
Real saints have to choose,

decide wearisome affairs
with tedious pluck,
and often sleep under the stairs.

Except for their laughter and tears,
you'd hardly know they'd been struck.

A Few Words About Dying

• Samuel Hynes

Now that I am middle-aged, I think about death a lot. Here in my secure suburb, protected equally against dying and against living, I brood over my own mortality. In the morning at breakfast, while the sun flows in over the mahogany and the china, while the wren sings in the dogwood tree and my wife smiles and brings in buttered toast, I read the obituaries in the *Times,* attending particularly to those men who were younger than I am, and are dead. Or in the evening, as I sit reading history and biography—facts are consoling to the middle-aged—I find myself subtracting birth-dates from death-dates in my head. King Henry IV died at the age of 56—I have a way to go to match him—but his son, Henry V, died at 35. And I feel an odd sense of triumph—I've beaten an English king in the only race that matters—and at the same time a sharp twinge of depression, because I am older than Henry was when he died, and I have had no Agincourt.

Yet all the actuarial figures tell me that I have nothing to worry about, not yet. The odds are that I will live to collect my Social Security, and to retire to Florida, with a ropy, old-man's neck and a cracking voice, that I will putter in a garden, stoically endure visits from the grandchildren I don't expect I'll like much, and die silently—survived by my widow, who, in the way of women, will never die at all.

There was a time, though, when death was an immediate and present possibility, as likely a commonplace as sex or whiskey. And I never gave it a second thought—not even a *first* thought, in fact. That was the War, when my generation got used to the regularity of other men's dying. In flight school, while I was learning to be a pilot, someone died every day—crashed on the airfield (there was a graveyard at the end of one of the runways, I remember, and we all thought this was a very funny joke), or dived mindlessly into a bombing target, or simply disappeared into darkness, or into the sea. But it was other men dying, and dying so remotely—a column of smoke in the distance, or an oil slick on the water—that we, who were so young and so ignorant, could not connect the event with this man or that, but thought of it, if we thought at all, only as a statistical fact to which we would always be exceptions.

Later, when we got out to the islands where the shooting war was, it was the same. Air strikes were sent off, and we counted the planes that came back, but objectively, as you might read the baseball scores. Planes were shot down, and were replaced; pilots died, and new pilots joined the squadron. We watched dogfights above our island as though they were entertainments provided by some superior USO, and we heard the murmur of the guns, where at the other end of the island the last Japanese were being destroyed, with-

out really hearing it, as one might grow accustomed to the sound of surf, or of subway trains.

I remember a day in the last summer of the war. It was hot and sunny and still, and I was lying naked in the sun, stretched out on a canvas cot, reading not very attentively at one of those odd-shaped paperbacks that the Army distributed to the troops. The day seemed quiet and peaceful, though the War was there, if you listened for it. A mile or so offshore the *Mississippi* was shelling a gun-emplacement, and the sound of the firing and the detonations of the shells reached me as a dull, monotonous rumble, like the sound of some factory manufacturing something heavy but uninteresting. And high over my head a couple of fighters fooled around, buzzing and whining, and scrawling the sky with meaningless calligraphic vapor trails. But the earth around me was silently, soporifically hot, and I might have been, except for my nakedness, on any beach back home, sunburned and sweating and thinking about nothing.

On a cot next to mine, an ugly Texan called Rock Johnson was lying propped on his elbow, fooling with his handlebar moustache, and talking about wild parties back at A&M.

"And then," Rock was saying, "I just went in and sat on the commode for a while. You know how sometimes when you're drunk you just want to set on the commode. Just set there a while?"

I said booze didn't hit me that way.

"Well, I was just settin' there, and this girl came bustin' in—I guess I forgot to lock the door—and she came bustin' in and she took one look—"

"Here they come," I said, and we turned over and watched a flight of Avengers come rumbling over the field. They looked as they always did in the air, cumbersome and tired, as though they didn't like flying much, and weren't very good at it, but they were in good formation, a tight V of V's, trying to look as much like fighters as their ungainly shapes would let them. They flew the length of the strip, and began to peel off for landing.

"Somebody's missing," Rock said. "There ain't but eleven."

I tried to remember who had gone on the strike, and where they had gone to, but I couldn't. None of my close friends, anyway. We watched the formation break into a stretched-out string of separate planes, watched wheels and flaps come down as one by one they turned in to land.

"So what did the girl do?"

Rock rolled back onto his stomach. "I was sort of scared of girls when I was a kid," he said. "Had to lay plans to even kiss one. Well, there I was, with my drawers down around my ankles, and this girl staring at me—"

"Here comes the other one." A single plane, flying low and slow, was approaching the control tower. It passed over us, so close and so slow-moving that I could see the oil streaks on the engine cowling and a small hole in the belly just aft of the wing. And I could see that the rear door, the gunners' door, had been jettisoned; there seemed to be someone there, looking out.

"Radio must be out," Rock said. "He's goin' around for a green light."

The plane made a slow circle of the airfield, and once more headed toward the strip. We could see the controller in the tower raise his signal light. The pilot began slowly to

rock his wings, slowly back and forth, to acknowledge the controller's signal.

Then, from the open door, something fell. Slowly, as though the sunlit air were bright water, it sank toward earth, turning and turning, very slowly. It struck the airstrip near the tower and bounced, suddenly and surprisingly high. And as it bounced, it opened, and became a spread-eagled man, and fell again to the earth, and lay, once more a lump, a something. The plane, as though relieved of an intolerable burden, circled more swiftly and prepared to land. On the strip near the tower there was a sudden flurry of jeeps, and an ambulance, and men running, but there was no sound—I particularly remember that there was no sound—except for the quick, bass roar as the pilot changed his engine to low pitch in his landing approach.

"He just fell out," Rock said. "How could a guy just fall out of an airplane?"

"Maybe he was hurt. The plane was hit, I could see that. Anyway, how did he know the pilot was going to wiggle his wings right then?"

"Hell, they must teach them something in training. You don't go hanging out of doors that way."

"Maybe he was dead, then."

The ambulance began to move slowly up the strip toward the sick bay, and the jeeps and men scattered as quickly as they had come. The strip was empty, except for the plane rolling slowly and clumsily to a stop. Even the sky was empty, not a plane or even a cloud in sight. The plane stood alone in the empty sunlight.

"I didn't think a man would bounce that high," Rock said after a while. "What's the human body made out of to bounce like that?" Rock began to punch his own naked body, testing its possible resilience.

"I guess a safe would bounce, if you dropped it from high enough."

"I don't believe I'd bounce that high."

"Not if you landed on your head. You'd stick on the point."

Rock began to twist his moustache. He seemed to have settled in his mind whatever question the bouncing body had raised. Finally he said, "I'd know what to do now, but I was just a freshman then, a regular country boy." We were back at A&M. "I just sat looking up at that girl, and she stood looking down at me, for maybe two whole minutes. Finally I just said, 'Scuse me,' and grabbed up my drawers and ran out of that room and downstairs and out the door. I ran all the way back to the dorm. And I never did see that girl again. Pretty, too, as near as I can remember." That was apparently the end of the story; Rock lay silently, staring off, perhaps at his ignorant, sexually deprived youth.

There's an end to the other story, too, if you want to know it. The plane had been hit by ground fire, a shell had exploded inside, knocked out the radio, killed the turret gunner, and wounded the radio operator. The wounded man couldn't talk to the pilot with the radio dead, and so he had tried to bail out, but had passed out in the door. When the plane tilted over the strip, he fell, and died. Rock always said he wouldn't have bounced so high if he'd been dead when he hit.

But you don't need the end of the story to see the point. That afternoon I saw death up close—not remote and hidden in a tangle of burning metal, but bare, a separate, exposed human being dying. It should have been a

moment of truth, and it was—just nothing. I didn't even remember it, until just now. But now, far from that day, and from the possibility of sudden death, I do remember it; I guess it has taken me twenty years to learn to believe what I saw then. Maybe death is something you have to grow into. It's the same for wisdom. And for love.

Dead Space

• **Emilie Glen**

Stage space
    Is dancing down dust
        From all the struck sets
Lights are cold
    Rats take stage
Sweepings where windows
    Jeweled green twilight
Rooftops shone tar-paper
    Against a neoned night sky
Where people shouted moaned
    Brawled cried

The actors
    Of last night at this time
        Are nowhere
Without their stage lives
    Except here
They are in the wings
    They're coming on
Houselights to half
    Houselights out
        Lights up

Dead space
    Between last night's play
        The play to come
The wait the shrivel-leafed wait
        In winter silence
Actors nowhere but here
    All the old sets rise
        In the building of the new
Dark wings
    Are crowded with actors
        Dancing down dust

First Dance

• Claude F. Koch

Jonathan was on his side of the fence when I came down, digging under a clump of wild asters.

"I'm glad that's settled," I said.

"Yes, it's nice to have things tidy. Now what?"

"Why did you leave last night?"

He settled the aster in a hole by the fence, in a puddle of water, and pushed earth in around it.

"Because my business was done, and I have promises to keep."

"Jonathan, you cleared out because you know that was a sneaky thing you did, and you just wouldn't face up to it."

He stood and tapped the trowel on the fence. "True, Lolly. It was a dastardly thing to do." He handed me the trowel across the fence and walked over to his back shed. When he came out, he had a spade and a bag of wild bird seed. "Is the marriage off?"

I pounded the trowel on the fence: "You're making fun of me, Jonathan!"

He handed me the bird seed and began to ditch the earth along the bricks. "That's one of the things you'll have to put up with. You've laid out a rough road for yourself, young lady."

I pounded the trowel again. "Weeds! All you do is dig at those weeds. With all the seeds in the world to choose from, you've got to collect weeds? I just can't understand some people."

"The domestication of wild flowers is a challenge, Lolly. They don't accommodate easily. You've got to find out what *they* like—they won't give an inch. They're actually—some of them at any rate—they're actually quite frail. I'm going up to the woods this afternoon to get some bergamot. Do you want to come along?"

I hitched myself over the fence. "What's that thing I caught my foot in?"

"The common vetch—if you were a woodchuck, you'd eat it."

"It sounds creepy. Tell me about bergamot."

"It wasn't always wild, the kind I'm after anyhow. When your ancestors were still chasing the Caledonian boar, it was a quiet garden flower in London. Some things stray when they're uprooted, Lolly."

The *toc* of his spade against the edges of the bricks was a flat sound, as though a broken clock were ticking aimlessly out the hours to noon. I sat against the shed wall and hugged my knees to my chin.

"What really happened to Dad, Jonathan?" I asked.

His back was toward me. The medal he wore around his neck lay against his back over the smudged T-shirt he wore. I could see the swelling of the bone at the base of his neck and the half circle each shoulder blade made as his arms moved up and down with the spade. His hair was almost gold at the crown—from days in the garden in the sun, I guessed. He sat the spade against the fence and turned and looked down at me. The sun was not quite overhead,

and his shadow covered me completely so that I didn't have to squint.

"Why did you come home, Lolly?" he asked, but I knew he had heard me the first time.

"I wanted to see what was here. I wanted to see what I could depend on."

"And *did* you?"

"I saw."

"Then rest with that for one day, Lolly." He reached down his hand to my shoulder, and sat cross-legged in front of me. "You're like him, you know. He always asks more questions of himself than a man could possibly answer."

"But I don't know what's going to happen to us, Jonathan."

Jonathan bowed his head and laced his fingers between his knees. His back was straight, and he sat so still that he reminded me of pictures I had seen of Buddhist monks, or Ronald Colman at Shangri-La. A squirrel came down the pear tree in our yard and hopped from the bottom branch onto the picket fence. It posed begging on the cross-plank of the fence, watching us.

"Tomorrow, Lolly, I'm going to City Hall and get a variance. Your father and I talked of this, but we didn't want to tell you and Gordie until we were sure it could be done. I'm going to put a door between the living rooms—yours and mine. Throw the houses together, so that the two of you will have companionship."

"You're going to break through the wall?"

"Yes."

"But what would Mom say?"

"I think she would say that we have to make do with what we have. She always did herself, you know."

"But if Dad would only stay home! Then that wouldn't be necessary. She always liked that stretch of wall. She put the tree there at Christmas."

"I know. I like walls myself—they make you look up, give a nice dimension to a place if the spirit's free on both sides." He dropped a stone into the cup of one hand, and doubled the cup by bringing the other to it. Then he held the hands out to me, cradling the stone.

"But you're no longer free, Lolly. You're caught in a dream of the past, and it's time the wall opened up." He brought his hands together as though he were praying, and the stone dropped out between his crossed legs. "You won't know it, my dear. I'll make a door of the pier glass. You won't see a door there—you'll see the old familiar house."

The squirrel complained of something or other and jumped down behind Jonathan. Then he took the long circle around, zig-zagging as though there were booby traps every few steps, and investigated the stone. He sat up again and complained. Jonathan reached into his breast pocket, where all the western heroes carry their cigarettes, and pulled out a nut. He held it in his palm and made a *ticking* sound. The squirrel gave him a beady eye.

"I don't want this summer to end, Jonathan."

"All summers end, Lolly."

"No."

"Lolly!"

The squirrel was looking at me, his old eye opaque and unreflecting as a witch's talisman before the spell is spoken. He didn't move, and I didn't move, and I heard another sigh through the trees, and Jonathan said "Life"—and I saw a light in the squirrel's eye as the stone awoke, and

I remembered a summer that would never end.

It was ages ago when I was nine; Gordie was just a child, and things were too tight to go to the shore. It was the summer I became friends with Johnny, and that wasn't easy to do, because he was in eighth grade and he claimed I got in his way. It was the long roll of metal wheels I remember behind it all, that and the evening light, so frail, as though a transom were closing on summer, and up on the hill where the boys skated in the middle of the block there were gas lamps with their lemon light, and at the corners the high incandescent arcs where the light was peeled in flat planes like the white slice of an early apple.

Paul and Gordie were away at scout camp, and Phil was working part time on the Reading and every evening, after supper, I waited at the foot of the back stairs for Johnny to come down on skates, as he wasn't allowed to do.

I had Gordie's Ingersoll watch that he was afraid to take to camp, and I leaned into the stairwell and called up to Johnny.

"Go away," he said, as he said every night, "I got a game—skate with the girls."

"It's way after six, and you know you're not supposed to come down the stairs on skates."

I can hear him clumping down, and his hockey stick scraping along the wall paper.

"You'll wear that watch out while you're clowning around," he said, "and it'll serve you right."

In the dining room, Mom was swatting flies. I could hear her saying, "Oh, my!" and "Oh, you!" Mom didn't have the batter's eye. I skipped out the kitchen door ahead of Johnny and listened for the fuss.

It came all right. Not on Mom's part—but Johnny's. I still see him all blurred through the screen, biting his lip as he tries to pussyfoot on skates across the kitchen floor.

"Johnny? Is that you, Johnny?" Mom says.

Johnny grabs for the sink. "Yes, ma'am."

"You be at the convent at eight—now, don't you forget, son. I want to know your schedule for next week." Then Mom whacks for dear life. "I'm getting tired ironing altar boy's stuff at the last minute."

"O.K., Mom." Johnny inches toward the door. "I'll remember."

"And what have I told you about skating in the house?"

Johnny always had a stock reply for that, garbled so that Mom couldn't really make it out, and just the proper tone. Before Mom could give up on the fly, and just as I got behind the hedge, Johnny bounced out the door.

"You'll get it, Johnny," I said. "Wait till you get home tonight!"

He hopped on the grass and whacked me on the bottom with the hockey stick. And I wailed, not because it hurt, but kind of in appreciation that he had noticed me. *He* didn't want to be noticed any more, though, so he kept to the grass until he got out on the street.

"Wait for me, Johnny." I ran down the pavement ahead of him and squatted on the curb, furiously trying to get my skates on before he started up the hill. I never did, though, and he passed behind me, waving his stick, and out of the light of the gas lamp, and all that was left of him was the long, summer roll of the wheels, while I shouted: "Wait for me, you old, you—!"

ii

They were all up on the hill that summer in the evening, the boys in the street and the girls on the curb, everyone on skates and nothing still. No one said hello to anyone; they just rolled up and barged in if they were boys, and rolled up and wiggled around if they were girls. And in that awful mess of flailing arms and legs and murderous sticks I can see Johnny, who is always the gentlest of my brothers, whack the puck, that that night is a cartwheel from some kid's toy wagon, as true as a die between the goalie's knock-knees. Then they shout and the goalie tosses the puck out and it starts all over again, while the girls jabber and flutter, along the curb. They give me a pain even then, and I swing back and forth from the lamppost, watching Johnny, and teetering like an unlocked swivel.

Once he tears toward me, and brings himself up on a dime at the last minute, just as it seems he'll go right through me and the lamppost.

"My gosh," he says, "don't girls ever *do* anything?"

"It's almost time. Mom said." I hold out my wrist and twist it because I'm double-jointed and it's the only thing I can do that he can't do. He bends down over the watch and screws his eyes as though he can't see it.

"You're wearing that thing upside down. You're hopeless." And he barrels off into the mess again.

The one thing I knew about Johnny was that he would never leave me alone once he knew I was around; but I had to figure ways to keep up with him. That's how I spent that summer, keeping up with Johnny: it was the calculation of my life. And now I pushed my skates against the base of the lamppost, and held on with both hands, and swung back so that I saw the furious old hockey game upside down. And I swayed back and forth, back and forth until I got dizzy enough that the great lantern on top of the pole was lopsided when I pulled my head up to look at it and it grew big like a crystal ball and I could see in it what to do.

I saw I had to beat Johnny down to the convent, and I hugged the green metal pole because I was grateful and because I was dizzy. Then I snuck out behind the girls, along the grass, digging my front skate wheels into the roots of the grass so there wouldn't be a sound. And when I got to the arc light at the corner, I hopped out on the pavement and began to coast down the hill. There was only the sound of my own wheels like a metal strip being unrolled, faster and faster, and the breeze that I was making myself hit me in the face, and I got scared and tried to skip back on the grass and tumbled down and skinned my chin and my knee—while the metal strip seemed to roll up again behind me as I lay there out of breath and sobbing. I was close up against a hedge of wild roses. The scent of them made the darkness like a pillow, and I would have stayed there forever on the crushed grass and nursed my wounds, but I thought I heard the sound of another skate far up the hill. If that was Johnny I would miss him, and have to climb the long dark hill alone to home. So I pushed myself up and licked my fingers and rubbed them across my skinned knee and licked them again and rubbed them over my scratched chin. This time I used the telephone poles as bases, and skated down from one to the other; it was slower, but I kept my feet.

When I bounced along, jarred by each crack in the cement till the whole night danced, it was only my own skates that sounded like a rolling up of chains in a huge tin can—but then I'd bump up against a pole and the noise itself would seem to be drawn out up the hill, snakelike and dim, and lonely as a horn that no one answers to. At the trolley tracks, the arc light cast shadows of the lindens on Kelpius Road, and the moths pattering against the light were as huge as birds among the shadows on the ground. Far up the street a trolley bell made two soft, punctual notes, and I sat on the curb and waited for the trolley to come like a lighted golden chariot, swaying into sight, sounding for all the world like Uncle Jon's typewriter when he worked on the card table in his garden on summer evenings—a clacking and a rattling of the carriage, then the warning bell, then the stop, and over and over again from way up the road. I wonder how their journey ended, those people who were on the trolley that night. It stopped at the corner; the motorman waved to me, and the smell of the air brakes was as sweet as the lindens. An old colored woman at an open window smiled, but her glasses gave back the light like reflectors and I never knew if she was smiling at me. A baldheaded man was asleep with his head lolling against the window and his mouth open. Then the trolley moved again, and there was a question I would have asked the motorman if I could have said what it was. The pole shot off sparks as though it moved among the stars. The red light went out under the railroad bridge at Wayne Junction, and I pushed myself off the curb.

Half way down the block across the tracks, beyond two carpenters' gothic houses that no one lingered by at night because of the ghosts—the convent and the school, the church and the rectory rose from the bricked yard among the bricked-in trees, solid, austere, and mysterious. In the daytime it was like an ant hill; but at night before nine, though there was a light behind every shade in the convent, and a light in one room of the school, not even a cat was likely to be about. I crossed to the other side, where all the tony Irish Catholics lived, and pulled up at the step of Gildea's Funeral Home. What I wanted was to get to the bushes by the convent door and hide until Johnny came, but I didn't dare come clattering over that long yard on skates, and stir up those godawful echoes on consecrated ground. It never seemed much like consecrated ground during the day, I'll say that much.

It was trespassing when the moon was out, but I blessed myself, while all those blank windows stared down, and got across into the bushes. It wasn't until I'd squeezed in against the crazy branched trunk of a huge old azalea and stashed away my skates against its roots that I heard the odd music. It came from the direction of the school, something between the spooky dirge of the Requiem Mass and those perky little love songs Mom was always humming. It could have come from underground, or the air itself, it was that strange; and when it suddenly stopped I was listening so hard that the song of the crickets banged in my ears like the bark of a dog. Then it began again, the same melody over, and I began to sweat; because even if it was a victrola it shouldn't have been there at that time of night in that place—and it shouldn't have been making sounds like

that under any conditions. Then, like the clatter of a knight's charger far away, I heard the roll of skate wheels —and I wasn't afraid of the music any more.

I could imagine the steps Johnny was taking, the long sweeps on one foot, the slight hesitation before the other took over; and sometimes he was coasting on both feet, hopping over cracks—as fleet as Hermes in his winged sandals. I didn't poke my head out to see him, but the roar that drowned out all the music told me he was there. He hopped up the steps, and there was silence while he pushed the bell.

I knew who would come: Sister-portress, who was so old even then that she leaned against the ten foot oak door for breath after she opened it.

"S'ter," I heard Johnny say, "Mom wants to know about my Masses this week. Can I speak to Sister Clair?"

"She's still working in the classroom," Sister-portress said. "I think she went over there for quiet. You tell her she's going to get locked out, Johnny."

"Yes, S'ter."

"And don't you skate across this yard and waken the dead at this hour, young man."

"Yes, S'ter."

"Do you want an apple?"

"Yes, S'ter."

The door shut with hardly a sound, and I inched my head out between the branches. Johnny was sitting on the top step, flooded with moonlight, and unscrewing his skate locks. He heard the branches, I guess, and looked up. "Oh, no," he said.

So I picked up my skates and came out, "Do you hear that?" I asked.

"Don't haunt me, for Pete's sake."

"That music."

"Yeh," he said. Then he cocked his head, and said in a different tone, "Yeh!"

But the door started to open, and I dove back under the azalea again.

"Thank you, S'ter," I heard him say.

"Boys eat twenty-four hours of the day," Sister-portress said, as though she had discovered a happy secret.

I heard the door shut again, and when I got out, Johnny had split the apple and was waiting for me.

"Well, you're here," he said, and I took a half.

"Yeah," he said, "what about that music?"

He held his skates against his shirt so that the wheels wouldn't rattle, and I did the same. Then he padded on the flat of his feet toward the window in the school building that showed behind its drawn shades. I followed, keeping right in his shadow that the moon made. The music scarcely got louder.

"Hey," I whispered, "aren't you going in to see Sister Clair?"

"Quiet." He waved a hand behind him like a tail. He got as far as the window and stood on his toes, grabbing the ledge so that his chin just reached the sill. I stopped behind him, and then ran over and flattened myself against the wall.

For a moment I just saw his mouth hanging open; then he said, "Holy mackerel!" He looked at me as though I wasn't there and said, "Geez!" in the kind of tone an altar boy'd use if he dropped the censer on the pastor's foot.

"Johnny," I tugged at his trousers. "What is it; let me see!"

He swatted at me as if I were a fly. The shade was up just an inch or so, and his forehead was pressed tight against the glass.

I whispered as loud as I could: "Let me see," and he swatted at me again and lost his hold and sat down hard.

But he wasn't angry; just flabbergasted. "Yeah," he said, "you'd better." He squatted down. "Climb up on my back, Lolly. But go easy, will you?"

I climbed up. No one but Johnny would let me do that; and I trusted him completely. He would not pull out from under. And what I saw made us friends forever.

Sister Clair was spinning, her arms over her head with the hands as no hands were ever meant to be bent. And on her face, as she slowed in her belling habit, a bewildering expression, soft and absorbed, an expression I had never seen and could not understand.

Something happened in the music, and she made a leap that caught her body in a half-fall, like one of the girls folding on the curb like a hinge on the edge of the hockey game. It seemed as if someone had flipped her up, catching an invisible hockey stick under a heel. Her habit flew back like the sound bow of a ringing bell and I sucked in my breath. It was thrilling, like a Frankenstein movie, because she was almost directly on her toes. Then she leapt again while the music got odder and did prodigies of grace. "Holy cow!" I said, and banged my forehead against the glass. She stopped as though it were a spell, her hands over her head, and perhaps up on her toes again; and Johnny gave way under me and I fell on top of him.

We sat on the grass staring at each other, and there was the rattle of a window opening, and Sister said, "Who's there?"

I rolled back against the wall. "Me," Johnny said, and then: "S'ter."

"I see it's you," Sister Clair said, "and I see you have company. Come out of there, Lolly."

I stood up and stepped out beside Johnny. Sister Clair was young, though I didn't think so then, and now that I saw her leaning out the window, the moonlight shining on her face, scrubbed and just a little severe, I doubted what I had seen before, and pressed up against Johnny for reassurance.

"Now just what do you two people want?"

"Mom wants to know about my Masses, S'ter." Johnny swallowed once or twice. "That's all."

"Well." She swept her hand out of her habit like a white pigeon taking flight off the window sill. "That's the door. Come around. And," she wiggled a finger down at us, "don't go snooping around like saboteurs."

"Yes, S'ter." Johnny nudged me and we got moving. At the front door, I asked Johnny: "What's a saboteur?"

"A commie," Johnny said.

We opened the school door. The music started up again down the corridor. It was dark, except for the wedge of light at Johnny's classroom.

"You go, Johnny, I'll wait here."

Johnny bent to put his skates on the step. Then he took mine out of my hand and settled them right beside his. He reached for my apple slice and rubbed it along his cuff to clean the dirt off. He took a bite to test it, and handed it back. He rubbed his apple and held it to my mouth. I bit into it. Then he took my hand. "C'mon," he said. We went to the classroom together. Sister was waiting for us at her door. "Here," she said, "I've written this all out for

your mother." Behind her we could see the classroom. It looked pretty much the same as it always did—but the music was playing.

"S'ter." Johnny hesitated with the note in his hand. Then he put his arm over my shoulder and took a deep breath. "S'ter, I couldn't do that."

She smiled, a tight little smile that could have been much bigger if she'd have let it. "You don't know what you can do yet, Johnny." She held out her hand and I put my apple slice into it. "Or what you'll be called upon to do." She bit into the slice. She handed me the apple and drew two fingers down across my eyes. "I was a dancer once, Lolly." She clapped her hands. "Now, scat, the two of you."

We ran down the corridor together, suddenly joyous. At the step, we got our skates and skipped across the yard, Johnny leaping like a wild thing. At the first old house, we turned, looking back to where the school and convent and church and rectory rose, dignified and austere, into the moonlight among the trees. And now I could hear the cicadas and crickets and music at the same time, soft night sounds as comforting and familiar as the fireflies. I held out my hand to Johnny, and we walked together up the hill to home.

iii

Then the squirrel's eye blinked, and Jonathan was speaking again: ". . . won't wait, Lolly. You've got to reconcile yourself to it."

"I can make it wait," I said.

His smile was like Sister Clair's.

"Did you ever see a nun dance, Jonathan?"

"Now what?"

"I've seen some wonderful things," I said.

His First View of the Atlantic or the Birth of the Hermit

• John Judson

In my eyes I felt
the wicked quietness of lakes,
was stirred by ripples,
trout, steelhead, bullhead,
until, like all streams
august or muddy, I reeled
at my own inception;
for who has known the sea,
fish or willow?
From inland I come,
supported by a wagon rung,
pockets stuffed with herbs,
flint, obsidian,
my countenance aged
beyond all mirrors.

Two Poems

• Emilie Glen

Feast of San Gennaro

San who this time?
    What excuse for feasting,
        For romping the cars off the street?
San Gennaro,
    Patron Saint of Naples,
He dances the block party
    Round and round Mulberry Street
        To the dragon-curve of Chinatown

Monoxide curls away
    In a blue cloud of cooking grease,
        To the smell of sausages
Italian sweet sweet and hot,
    Zeppoles hopping brown to the boil,
Peaking crisp for powdered sugar,
    Calzone swelling with ham and cheese
        In a bubbling pond

"Just like Genoa,"
    Says a man out of the here of the fair,
Voice for folk song,
  Skin dark as the chestnuts strung to festoons,
We walk along talking under flower arches
    Ready to light,
Still too day-early for the standstill crowds,
    Ferris-wheel yet to turn,
        Games of chance canvased down,
Image of San Gennaro apple-shining the sunset,
    The one walking alongside
        His dark skin shining red-brown

"Napoli Genoa Trieste,
    These street fairs are home to a seaman,
Jamaica is where I come from,"
    Sicilian carts are painted
        Bright as our walking along,

We stop for Italian ices that rainbow the counter
Near the spiced dragon of Chinatown,
Pause by a guitar maker's shop,
Talk of the calypso of his isle,
In stand-steps of lingering
We come to a booth piled with buns and nougatine
Across from chianti and brown Italian loaves,
He takes a brown leather volume,
Sun-dried salt-stiffened,
Treasurely from his pocket
Pages slip the broken binding to The Rubaiyat,
He asks where the bookstores are,
Where he can buy another,
"Let's stop in for a cup of espresso,"
"But I am hurrying, I really am,"
We sign a petition to save little Italy
From the expressway of the new Moses,
And I dip into a subway
Near a pagoda telephone booth

Days past the seaman
I walk the arch of lights,
Not hurrying.

Geode

Crack the geode
Crack it to amethyst
Crack all the geodes
All the hard-heads
Crack the gray stone of strangers
To the jewels inside
Word it to a cleavage
Crack the geode of music
The heaven-ball of birds in their flyways
Earth-ball of the seasons
Crack the geode of a skill
Geode of the sea
This geode of a globe
Will roll you round and round
Unless you crack it to star-sparks

The Green Flash

• Victor Chapin

Mrs. Newcombe put aside her book and, with it, her pretense of indifference. She leaned forward in her deck chair and gazed intently at the sky.

All of the passengers, who numbered only eight, were gathered at the rail, peering into the sunset, hoping to see the famous green flash. Some of them claimed to have seen it the evening before; but Mrs. Newcombe did not believe that any of them had, except the priest, Father Faure, who would not lie and was practiced in sky gazing in the Red Sea, having made the voyage from Europe to India many times before.

The sky was darkening. The spectacular sunsets characteristic of the Red Sea failed quickly. The green flash, which, according to Murray's Guide, was an explosion of green light that, for a second, convulsed the sky as the sun descended below the horizon, may not have occurred this evening, or Mrs. Newcombe may have blinked at the wrong moment and missed it. At any rate, she had failed to see it again.

She felt annoyed and wondered why. What did it matter whether or not she saw this minor phenomenon of nature? But, even as she reasoned against it, her annoyance increased as she observed the other passengers talking excitedly and saw Father Faure turn toward her. His ageless blue eyes, deep-set in a worn, strong face, questioned her, while a smile, sweet but tinged with wryness, twisted his thin mouth.

She was tempted to nod; thereby claiming that she had seen the green flash, but she felt certain that Father Faure would not be deceived. So she shook her head and then, disconcerted by the impact of Father Faure's look, turned away.

He came to her side and, standing above her, put a hand on the back of her deck chair. "Too bad," he said. "But you'll see it tomorrow."

"It doesn't matter," she said. "You can't see everything when you travel. I accepted that long ago."

"That depends on why you are traveling, on what it is you are looking for."

Mrs. Newcombe looked down at her lap rug and, to control her reaction, which she thought was impatient, traced its design with her eyes. She had decided to ignore as much as possible everything Father Faure said to her, for she thought that he, with nothing better to do on a long voyage, had made up his mind to convert her. Though she had put herself on guard and was amused that, of all unlikely people, Father Faure had chosen her, she found he could disturb her. She did not know why. Certainly, she was not a subject for conversion, being firmly fixed in her Protestant ways. To her, religion was a private matter to be discussed with no one. When she thought that she needed God, she addressed herself directly to Him. It was as simple as that, she thought, and had no reason to doubt it.

"I told you why I'm traveling," she said.

"Yes." He spoke softly and his voice, as always, both soothed and stirred, like a good actor's voice or that of a clever politician. "You did tell me. You have a daughter in Madras."

"My son-in-law is stationed there. I've always wanted to see India. So it was a good excuse to go."

"And, naturally, you want to see your daughter."

"Yes. And my grandchild. He was born in Madras, so I've never seen him. That's unbearable, you know, to have a grandson you've never seen."

"It's strange," said Father Faure, who, though Belgian by birth, spoke almost perfect English, "people have such distorted notions of India. It's not what people think, not a romantic country at all."

"I don't expect it to be, Father."

"I've spent thirty years in India, Madame. When I first went there, I was a callow priest, full of fire and zeal and, of course, my own importance. India was hard on me. It shook me up. I had to find my faith all over again. There is so much to see in India that would be better not to see. Most people who go there find a way to shut their eyes. But not you, Madame. You won't be able to shut your eyes."

Stirring uneasily, Mrs. Newcombe protested: "I'm afraid you think better of me than you should, Father. Don't think me more of a person than I am. I'm very limited, and I know it."

Father Faure still stood above her with his hand still touching the top of her chair. Since night had closed in, she could not see him clearly, but she thought that she could feel the effect of his smile, which, she thought, would suggest that he knew better than she. Gently, of course. Never with arrogance or superiority implied. She wished that he could be arrogant or say things that were unmistakably doctrinaire, for then she would be able to dismiss him from her mind.

"People don't often admit to limitations," he said now. "We never admit to them until we are done with them. Is that how it is with you? That's why you've come on this journey, isn't it? You have the desire to expand. Something has happened to you. Your life has changed. Or you want it to change. You're going to India to see your daughter. Yes, that is the excuse, as you said. But not the reason. There is another reason, Madame. You are searching for something. For God, perhaps. Isn't it true, Madame? Isn't that what you are hoping to find?"

Mrs. Newcombe was shocked, not by the priest's words, but by her reaction to them. She had giggled nervously, like an ignorant young girl confronted by tragedy.

It was time for her to get up from her deck chair. She should go to her cabin to dress for dinner. But she did not move, despite the chill she felt and the sense of annoyance at her own confusion. She did not know whether she was profoundly embarrassed or else obscurely amused.

He was waiting for her to answer. This, she supposed, was the moment that he had contrived to bring about, the one in which she was to confide in him. She was supposed to give him her life to examine and then ask him for comfort. He appeared to take it for granted that she required comforting. But for what? For growing old? For having lost a husband whom she had continued to respect but had slowly ceased to love? For losing her children to wives and

husbands? For regretting the charm and ease of the past and disliking much of the present?

No, she thought, Father Faure had addressed himself to the wrong woman. Her kind of woman did not consciously search for God. She was incapable of thinking in such terms. God was accepted as was life itself. He was worshipped quietly, subtly, modestly. He was never too closely defined. To say that one was searching for God implied a certain arrogance or presumption. Such an idea was in questionable taste. It was merely a concept and suspiciously literary. Father Faure knew better but had made the mistake of thinking that she did not.

Though she felt now that she could be finished with Father Faure, having established in her mind a reason for resenting him, she felt that she owed him respect, if not for what he said or even, perhaps, for what he believed, at least for what he had done, for he was no mere plodding priest but the head of a great mission, which included schools and hospitals as well as churches and convents.

"Really, Father," she said at last, "I think you've misunderstood me. I don't believe you're familiar with American women, not my kind, at least. We came from what they call the Puritan tradition. I'm sure you know what that means. I was brought up to believe strongly in two things, common sense and good behavior. I was taught to think that character is what matters most. My kind of woman is reverent but seldom mystic. We learn to be self-contained and we don't frighten easily."

Father Faure moved away. He stood before her, a distance from the deck chair. His face was hardly discernible, but she could see his eyes, which seemed to have turned green in the darkness. "I respect you profoundly," he said. "And I shall pray for you." He bowed slightly and walked away.

Though Father Faure did not speak to her again that evening, she caught herself looking at him during dinner and, afterwards, in the small salon. He appeared to be unaware of her, even when she said good night and got up from her chair to go to her cabin. He nodded politely and smiled at her vaguely, as if he had already forgotten who she was.

As, unable to sleep, she lay in her berth, she began to feel angry, with herself as much as with Father Faure. If he had disturbed her, it was not his fault but hers. She had no right to resent the loss of what she had considered a rich and rewarding life. She could have kept up her habits: the friends of years, the clubs she had dominated, the concerts she had arranged. Other women did it. Widows active and useful, losing themselves in civic or cultural activities. But it all added up to compromise and compensation, which was what she hated and would not accept.

That, she thought, was what Father Faure had discovered in her. He knew better than she did what it was that she wished to escape. Not herself but the self that age and loneliness imposed upon her. She had been given a choice and had accepted it. She could turn to others or withdraw into herself. She had chosen herself, but more from pride than conviction. And now, with the choice made, she was confronted by her own inadequacy. She had discovered that she was no more than the woman she had been, composed of habits, possessions, traditions, pride. She did not

think that she lacked courage, but she did lack curiosity. She was too old for adventures, in time or thought or space. What she wanted now was peace, which she might define but could not achieve; and she knew now that she had failed in the first requirement of peace, which was that she must not ask too much of it.

Next morning, as the ship moved closer to the African coast, Mrs. Newcombe read what Murray's Guide had to say about Port Sudan, where they were to spend the day. It was, she learned, a modern port built by the English on flat land reclaimed from the sea. Except for a few English residents, the population though mixed racially, was entirely Moslem by faith. Mecca itself was almost directly opposite, a few miles inland across the narrow sea. She was on deck, assimilating these few facts, when Father Faure came to the rail beside her. They looked across the pale Red Sea waters to the parched coast beyond.

"What's there?" she asked. "What's it like?"

"There is very little there," he answered. "I can't promise you that it will be interesting. Not even as interesting as Port Said."

"I didn't care for Port Said."

"This is worse. No, not in *that* sense. Simply duller. I don't recommend that you go ashore today."

"But I *want* to, Father. I want to see everything. As much as I can, I mean. It is Africa, after all."

"Hardly the *real* Africa, if there is such a thing. This is the Africa of the desert. The Moslem Africa."

"I don't know much about Moslems," she said, shading her eyes against the light, which, early as it was, had become glaring already. "I know that they believe in one God as we do and are permitted four wives and that the human figure is forbidden in their art."

"I've known many Moslems," Father Faure said quietly. "I've saved the lives of many of them. But I've never saved a Moslem soul."

Mrs. Newcombe turned to look into Father Faure's face. "But you've tried?" she asked.

"In my way. It's a challenge. But there are many challenges. I can't expect to meet them all. I'm forced to remind myself of that from time to time. You see, I suffer from the sin of pride."

Mrs. Newcombe felt herself touched by inexplicable remorse. "I'd like to visit your mission," she said. "Is it far from Madras?"

"Yes, very far. We are away in the north near Darjeeling, close to the Himalayas. It's very remote, I'm afraid. But even so, you might visit us. Why not? And if you can't, there are other missions. I'll give you the names."

The ship was entering the harbor. Mrs. Newcombe watched as they neared land. In the distance, along the beaches, there were giant blocks of salt that shone with a glittering whiteness. Farther away, almost on the horizon, there were withered hills, crenelated and strangely shaped, drained by the sun of all color. Suddenly, she felt afraid, of such an aged and empty landscape and of the merciless sun. She turned away, wondering what it was she had wanted from Africa and from Asia and aware that once again Father Faure had been right. She had romanticized countries, for she had wanted them for her escape.

The ship tied up at a breakwater across the bay from the town. Soon the lower decks were swarming with

coolies dressed in burlap, who giggled together and looked shyly out at sea, pretending not to feel the searching eyes of the passengers on the upper deck.

"Fuzzy-wuzzies," people whispered excitedly, remembering stories of General Gordon and Khartoum. But, on the whole, they were disappointed, for these blue-black warriors were thin and delicate with the graceful, diffident mannerisms of young girls. Only their halos of bushy hair, from which protruded the sharp lines of long bone needles, suggested the savage and satisfied the passengers that history had not deceived them.

Mrs. Newcombe was the only woman who decided to venture across the bay to Port Sudan. With the priest beside her, she sat erect on the plank seat of a rowboat and tried to avoid the leering eyes of the toothless Sudanese who handled the oars. Behind him were two men in dirty white turbans who stared at her unceasingly as they spat betel juice into the bottom of the boat. "Why do they stare so?" she asked.

Father Faure laughed softly. "Your face is uncovered," he said. "That's still a novelty to them. Purdah is very strict in this part of the world."

The boat came alongside a rotting pier. Father Faure jumped out and offered his hand to Mrs. Newcombe.

"Welcome to Africa," he said when she was safely beside him.

"But Egypt is Africa, isn't it?"

"Yes, a different Africa. This is more African. But only a little more."

"How hot it is!" she said. Then she laughed. "But I expected that. Africa is supposed to be hot."

"There's not much to see, I'm afraid." Father Faure paid the boatman and, offering his arm, led the way. "We can lunch at the convent. The Sisters like to have guests. People don't come this way very often."

As they walked up the filth-strewn street to a park with dusty, emaciated trees and then past the villas of the English to the convent behind the town, they were followed by a crowd of well-behaved, silent Arabs and Sudanese. Several youths, bolder than the others, strutted beside them, twirling ebony batons. Their faces were the color of prunes, but their hair was dyed a flamingo red, and they wore orange shorts and matching caps. Every so often they grinned at Mrs. Newcombe and addressed her in Arabic or Sudanese. Mrs. Newcombe smiled at them. She was attracted by their flamboyant appearance, their carefree manner, and intrigued by their beautiful, delicate features. Their eyes, as they gazed at her, suggested merriment and secrets. They showed her neither resentment nor respect, and suddenly, realizing that here she had no standing and no position and was no more than a curiosity, she felt a pang of fear but also the sting of excitement. She was nothing to these people and so might become anything she wanted.

The convent was a bare, one-storied building of faded pink stucco, stained and streaked by monsoons, built for coolness but not for comfort. Mrs. Newcombe, already exhausted by the heat, was led to a room that contained nothing but a table and a wicker chair, in which she relaxed gratefully, while Father Faure went away to confer with the Mother Superior.

Feeling dizzy, she closed her eyes. Memory reproduced for her a procession of sights in the town: a glimpse of lepers cringing against a wall . . . dried hills . . . black faces

scarred by tribal marks . . . a scrofulous camel with malicious eyes . . . men's eyes, alien and hostile, staring, staring.

When she awoke, she did not know how long she had slept. Suddenly, she thought that she had not seen a woman in the town, and she was frightened, unreasonably but intensely. A place where women were hidden, where men stared with abstracted lust, where she was no more than an object: such a place, she thought, should not belong in the world and she should not be in it.

It was as if the confines of her past existence had dropped away, leaving a vacuum that was vast and terrible. Habits and conventions, though she had despised them, were all that had protected her from this.

Then Father Faure came into the room. He was smiling, but when he saw Mrs. Newcombe, his smile faded and he hurried toward her. "Are you ill, Madame?" he asked anxiously.

She gestured impatiently. "No. I'm not ill. But I fell asleep and was dreaming. Now I can't help wondering why I went to so much trouble to see the world. I was safe and comfortable at home."

Father Faure frowned and looked at her curiously. "You regret this journey, then?"

"I don't know, Father. I don't think I like what I see."

"Then, you must look further." Father Faure took her arm. "The Sisters are waiting for lunch. They are very excited about having you as their guest."

He led her to a bare, narrow room where the Sisters were waiting at table. They looked at her with frank appraisal. They all had plain, humble faces. Their eyes were timid and yet shrewd. They looked her over, seeing her clothes, guessing her age, counting her children, her wealth, and her years of living. She felt that they saw everything and, when they looked away, that they had judged her. She knew that they had found nothing in her to envy or to regret for themselves.

After luncheon, the Mother Superior, a robust woman with a shining pink face, invited her into her study. They conversed quietly, without asking any questions, and Mrs. Newcombe realized this after a few minutes. "Have you been here long?" she asked, determined to satisfy her curiosity about the Sisters even if they would never admit to curiosity about her.

"Twenty-five years, Madame."

"And how often do you go back to France?"

"I have never been back."

"Never?" Mrs. Newcombe gasped incredulously. She glanced at the Superior, wondering what it would be like to be shut away like this, cut off from the world, from love and diversions, from comfort and all the charm of life. And yet, the Superior did not look any the worse for it. She was bright and full of health; confidence and competence were written on her countenance; and, yes, there was happiness in her eyes.

The Superior smiled. "You musn't feel sorry for us," she said. "We have no need to go home. Perhaps at first we suffered a little. But not any more. We're happy here, Madame."

After she had rejoined Father Faure and they had said farewell to the Sisters, they walked back through the town. Mrs. Newcombe paid little attention to their surroundings, for she was thinking of the Sisters, wondering why she had been struck with envy of them. Was it their mission

she envied? Yes, she thought, it must be that. That was what she regretted, that she had never had a mission, except to be Mrs. Cyrus Newcombe, a mission that she now admitted had failed, for reasons she had never questioned because she had not cared to know.

As they neared the center of town, a woman passed them, hurrying in the heat with head lowered to protect her from the sun and the gaze of men. She was dressed from head to foot in heavy black cloth. A piece of purple gauze, extending from her hairline to her chin, covered her face. The flimsy stuff clung to her features, giving them a mummy's look. Even her hands were covered, encased in white cotton mittens. Mrs. Newcombe shuddered and turned to Father Faure. "So that's what it's like," she said. "I wish I could tear that veil from her face."

He laughed. "That would be unkind," he said.

The sun was low in the sky, but still there were no shadows on the ground. With the approach of evening, the hard tropical light darkened so that the whole town appeared to be one great shadow lying between the crumbling hills and the flat, somnolent sea.

They came to a large square before a mosque. It was filled with Moslems, several hundred of them, all in turbans and flowing white robes. As she watched, they suddenly kneeled, in long, precise lines, and bowed to the east in perfect unison. The cry of the muezzin, mournful, oblique, issued from a minaret, and somewhere in the distance, a pack of pariah dogs howled in response.

Father Faure took her arm and hurried her along, past the square into a wide arcaded street where the one-storied buildings were whitewashed or painted pink, blue, or yellow. Under the arcade was a great expanse of unoccupied tables and chairs outside a group of cafes.

"We'll sit here until it's time to go," Father Faure said. "We can have coffee, or whatever you like."

No sooner had they seated themselves at a table than a crowd, appearing from nowhere, gathered around them. The proprietor of one of the cafes, a European—probably a Greek—stood protectively by them and flapped his napkin at the men pressing closer. It had no effect. Father Faure gestured and shouted in Arabic. No one moved; no one answered. Each man in the crowd (there were no women) stared at Mrs. Newcombe and exposed their teeth in meaningful smiles. Two youths with flaming hair, the same that had followed them that morning, darted from the throng and came toward them, smiling and gesturing.

"Shoeshine boys," said the cafe proprietor. "Better have shoes shined, Father."

The shoeshine boys began to squabble, pushing each other and shouting. The crowd shouted with them.

"Very simple," said the proprietor. "Two shoes. Two boys. One for each."

"But my shoes are suede, I'm afraid." He stuck out his feet, to show the boys his shoes. They ran forward eagerly. The proprietor held up a commanding hand. The boys stopped, staring down angrily at Father Faure's neatly brushed suede shoes.

"I tell them to go, but it does no good," the proprietor said.

"What harm can they do?" Mrs. Newcombe asked.

"Better give baksheesh," said the

proprietor. "Throw some coins. Let them fight."

Father Faure took some coins from his pocket and threw them on the pavement under the arcade. The mob rushed forward; but the shoeshine boys were quicker. One of them fell upon the coins and gathered them all up. Enraged at his public disgrace, the second boy sprang at his friend. They rolled over and over on the pavement, pummeling each other furiously. One, managing to get free, stood up. He ran to a corner of the arcade where the shoeshine equipment was kept, picked up a bottle of liquid polish, and hurled it at his friend. It flew far above his head and landed on the table in front of Mrs. Newcombe and Father Faure. There was a sharp crack, and red polish gushed like oil from a newly sprung well.

Mrs. Newcombe stared numbly at Father Faure. His face was splattered with polish that was oozing and garishly red. His Roman collar was streaked and his suit was covered with bright red clots. She realized that she, too, was covered with polish and reached up to touch her face. A drop trickled into her eye, and she saw the priest, the still burning sun, and the advancing crowd of Arab men through a thin red film that colored and distorted what she saw. Suddenly, she felt terrified and, without thinking, got to her feet and ran. Her head was lowered and she was frantically rubbing her eyes, so she did not see where she was going. She was aware of nothing but panic until she was confronted by the crowd and felt their eyes reaching for her and their hands slowly rising to touch her. She looked up, into a confusion of evil smiles and rotting teeth. She inhaled dirt and sweat and disease and suffered the impact of an abstract but concerted lust.

She backed away, slowly. Her eyes were held prisoner by the eyes of the crowd. She tried to look away, to scream, to run. But she was caught, suspended in terror, frozen by the certainty that there was no escape from what was to happen.

She felt an arm on her shoulder and was conscious of Father Faure's body as he pushed himself between her and the crowd. They stood together while he shielded her. But there was a circle of men now, moving in like dancers in a ritual play. Father Faure raised an arm and shouted in a deep, commanding voice. The crowd shivered, then voices rose to shrieks, and there was laughter, loud and vibrant, which seemed to shake the stones beneath their feet. Father Faure shouted again and clasped her to him, shielding her red-stained head with his red-stained chest. Stones, sticks, and pieces of camel's dung struck them, pelting like hailstones. Father Faure shuddered and, with a great sigh, fell to his knees, pulling her down with him. He was whispering in French, a prayer.

She heard more shouting and felt the earth shake from the pounding of feet. She waited to die, calmed by the sudden acceptance of death and by a vision of enormous space, in which she thought she perceived the height and depth of eternity.

Then, she heard the sharp sound of a whistle. Hands seized her, not roughly but protectingly. She looked up and saw two black police officers. They were dressed in khaki shorts and held polished clubs in their hands. The crowd was retreating, mumbling now as they shuffled away in the cloud of dust they had raised.

Some were still laughing, but quietly and with seeming good humor, as if it had all been a joke that had been misunderstood. She turned and looked into Father Faure's face. It was smeared with the red polish but its expression was unmistakable, anguished and ashamed, contorted not by fear but by some terrible disappointment. "O God!" he murmured. "Why did this happen?"

She touched his arm lightly. "I'm a fool," she said. "Forgive me."

He shook his head and looked away quickly. The police officers urged them ahead, and they hurried out of the square, toward the landing pier. The shoeshine boys with their orange hair and twirling ebony batons strutted beside them, dodging the policemen as they flourished their sticks, grinning up at Mrs. Newcombe. They had merry smiles, she thought, and their eyes glistened, if not with friendliness, at least with curiosity.

But she could not pay attention to the orange-haired boys or to the people in the street who, pressed against the walls, stared as they passed, emptily, with no memory of what had happened in the square. She was thinking, remembering. Father Faure was silent as he walked beside her. His face was closed, and she knew that he too was intent upon thinking. The look of anguish, gone now from his face, persisted in her thoughts. She remembered the exact look on her husband's face when, years before, he had suffered the business defeat that had sent him into retirement and a premature death from an obscure but terrible grief that she had failed to understand. She remembered the contempt she had felt for him because he had worshipped his power and could not live without it; and she knew that for a moment she had felt the same contempt for Father Faure.

So, she thought, as they walked on, down the rough-stoned street, beside the foul-smelling open sewer trench, she was not so old after all. It was Father Faure the man who had disturbed her. He, like Cyrus, her husband, was a challenger. But Cyrus had been a challenger who could not be challenged.

She glanced to the right at Father Faure. She wondered if he was different from Cyrus. Was he simply a man whom she, without knowing, had foolishly loved?

He returned her look with his strange smile, in which irony lingered at the edges of humility. Then she knew that whatever it was, whatever last response he had awakened in her heart, it was gone. He was dead to her now as a man and had died for her much as Cyrus had. And, she thought—not with sorrow but with some relief—she was finally dead as a woman.

They were at the landing pier. The police officers were handing them into the boat, politely but firmly, with some amusement and a good deal of reproach clearly evident in their manner. She smiled at them, knowing she looked grotesque, being all disheveled and smeared with red. When she was seated in the boat's stern beside Father Faure, she waved. The two officers look startled, then waved back, and then, as the boat pulled away, began to guffaw with wild African laughter. They fell upon each other and pounded their fists each upon the other's back as they howled their outrageous mirth.

It was perhaps the same open boat they had used that morning, and the grinning, toothless boatman in the

dirty white turban was perhaps the same one that had ferried them before.

Father Faure reached into the bottom of the boat and picked up a tattered black umbrella, which he opened and held over her head. "I'm sorry, Madame," he said quietly. "I should have known better than to bring you on such an adventure."

"Adventure?" Mrs. Newcombe wanted to laugh, but the memory of the terror she had experienced in the square returned and almost panicked her again. Calming quickly, she felt fear give way to bitterness. Father Faure, she knew now, had offered her a last illusion, which she had wanted to take. Now, however, he had no illusions to offer. They were simply two aging people under a blazing sun, exhausted, frightened, and eager to rest.

She shut her mouth firmly, so she would not say what she thought, so she would not reproach the priest for what, after all, was no more his fault than hers.

She stared ahead of her, squinting in the glare. The boatman was watching her, and when he saw that she had noticed him, he smiled, bowed, and waved a hand toward the west. She looked up and saw that across the bay, over the hills, the sun was setting. The sky was full of great crimson clouds that were floating slowly toward the sun, gradually covering it until it was hidden. Then, almost imperceptibly, the clouds parted, and a torrent of light poured down like golden rain upon the hills.

Mrs. Newcombe felt a new and mysterious excitement. But she did not move. She simply gazed at the sky and, forgetting the priest who sat beside her, felt transported, as if she were about to gaze again into infinity. Then she saw something that filled her with a sense of wonder. There was a convulsion, brilliantly green, that tore the clouds apart and, for one magnificent second, obliterated the land, the sea, the sky.

Father Faure was watching her. She turned to him and nodded. Then he smiled, not his familiar smile, but a full, tender one that banished years from his face and, for a moment, gave it the look of a very young boy.

"Yes," she said aloud, "an adventure." She knew now that that was what her journey was intended to be and believed that that was what it would be. Just as Father Faure had suspected, the green flash was her signal.

The Hawk

• Martha Haskins Hume

The hawk on my wrist beaks his hood,
sits tethered, bartered for in blood.
Nor can he fly, escape the flood
till he slip leash and whip the wind,
thrust the moon's white fallows and swarm
up, up into the hinge of self and sun.
Self swings; he falls.
Once pandered, love despairs to fly;
Hooded, withers in the thigh.

Sunday's Children

• Nancy A. J. Potter

At 3:15 on the last Sunday afternoon of October, Virginia Scanlan parked her car outside a fun house on the boardwalk at Point of Firs. The fun house, properly named the Jungle of Horrors, was boarded up—had been boarded up for ten years. Ginny put down the sun visor and began reading an old issue of the *Digest* she kept in the glove compartment and had been reading off and on for several months. Before she got through two paragraphs of the condensed novel, all three hands of her watch crossed each other at 3:19. That might be a sign, but she couldn't act on only one of them. She looked around for another test. If the old gull squatting on the boardwalk flew toward her, she would start the car and drive past Steve Cleary's house. If the gull flew toward the beach, she would go back home and wash some blouses. It took the gull a long time to decide to move and then it only hopped around in a big circle cocking its head. Finally it half ran toward Ginny's car and looked affronted as she started the car and ground the gears.

When she reached Steve's street, she considered the possible tactics. She could crawl along at the lowest possible speed, not turning her head but shifting her eyes toward the porch where he might be sitting. Or she could speed along as if her life depended on getting off that street and then, with great surprise at seeing him, jam on the brakes and back to his front walk.

She arranged her face for the indifferent rush, but a hundred tics wrecked her mask. And naturally her plan to roar the length of the street crumbled. At that moment, she hoped he wouldn't be there at all, and then she could go home to the unwashed blouses and the long nap. But it was too late for that; Steve Cleary was taken, surprised, raking leaves in his front yard. Although she had been plotting this moment all day, she saw him as a stranger, guarding his lawn with a bamboo rake. His mother made him wear glasses at home. The weight of them seemed to make the rest of his face sag down to his big chin.

"Well, hello." He could not pretend to be happy at seeing Ginny.

The open smile she'd practiced on the street fell away, and she gave her face over entirely to the tics. She concentrated all her energy on getting an offhand tone into her voice, but all that came out was a squeak: "Could you come out with me for a little while now?"

He dug the bamboo rake into the grass. "I'd like to. I would. But my mother has this leaf project lined up. She wants them burned."

"Oh. Well, it doesn't matter. I just thought it was a nice day, and I happened to be driving by. That's all."

Somewhere Mrs. Cleary listened behind the screen door, from the garage, from the back porch. She would be standing, her shaking head stretched in front of her body on a rigid neck.

She could not give Ginny Scanlan the satisfaction of seeing her raking leaves. Mrs. Cleary sharpened her dislike for Ginny at breakfast every morning, and by afternoon it was very well polished.

"Perhaps later. I'll get done in an hour or so and then we can go to a movie or something. Could you meet me downstreet at five?"

His voice at home was a little above a whisper. It was as if he were giving a lesson in lip reading, to which she was to respond with the appropriate sign. She nodded and drove away from the enemy castle before the wicked witch came out on her rake.

She was no Gretel, by a damn sight, not at thirty-five. And he was no Hansel either, not at forty on his last birthday. Nor did Mrs. Cleary make a very good witch. Her sin and sorrow lay in living too long, which she knew well but denied hourly by making great promises of what she would do next week, next year, when she got on her feet again and settled a few things, when the buyer arrived for the house, when she moved into a little place of her own. In her seventy-fifth year she talked of a fresh start, saying you're as young as you feel. So she kept surprising the day by getting up earlier and earlier, scratching in the pantry and kitchen in the thin hours before dawn, eating a second breakfast on the stove fender a few hours later when Steve came downstairs at six. Each morning he searched for signs of new decay, which might be told with horror and satisfaction, in the dropping of a dish or a fit of tears. But every year she reckoned on more weakness and shrewdly studied ways to lean her chin on her hand to hide the shaking, to conceal the liver spots on her hands by wearing gloves, to change the subject when she forgot names. Steve patched the weak spots in the dike, bought her new glasses with built-in hearing aids and space shoes and tranquilizers before Mame Cleary knew they made such things and before she'd studied how to avoid them. Most of the time when Steve was around she sat hidden behind the stove, often in the dark to save the electricity, watching the plain clock with Roman numbers until it was exactly the hour or the half-hour. Then she listened to five minutes of the news. When he was not there, she probably sneaked around the house the way women do, but still listened to the news or worried about whether the clock was right. She was cheerful, except on the subject of Virginia Scanlan, and if you asked how she felt, she always said, "A hundred percent."

About old age, Ginny knew a few things too. She had buried two grandmothers, one miserable and fat who got eaten with cancer, the other gentle and thin who died at Ginny's high school graduation. After the grandmothers, came great aunts and uncles who didn't count because they sickened and decayed elsewhere. The present source of information was her own mother, who spent the nights crying out names and imperative sentences from behind the door of the bedroom she no longer shared with Mr. Scanlan, who could not climb stairs after his last stroke. It took him a long time to scuff from the living room sofa that was his bed to the kitchen table, but once there, he ate like a horse and he listened to all the Red Sox games and he always knew who Ginny was. It could have been much worse.

She drove back to the fun house,

parked again, and tried to read the condensed novel. But she found herself reading the wrong words. This kept happening. On the table of contents "Snore Cures" became "Snake Crews." Something called "Are We Picking the Right President" was "Are We Pickling the Night Residue." Too tired, she supposed. Even the newspapers were too hard. She would really have liked to go back home and sleep away the afternoon. But her suburb was almost on the other side of the city, and now that she'd made so much a fool of herself, she deserved to sit there.

The town Steve had always lived in was on the shore. Once the city had pushed itself that far, it gave up and left behind its pretenses: strings of bungalows with scrawny gardens behind them. But the city had never been able to convert Point of Firs to urban ways. One defense against that was the amusement park, never really successful. Even in its best years it had been shabby. Then as fires and bankruptcies made bigger gaps along the boardwalk, the season became shorter and the rides fewer. The roller coaster finally sagged and stopped running. The Democrats and the P.T.A. held state conventions in the Grand Typee ballroom with the revolving stained glass chandelier. They did not use the chandelier, of course, but Steve remembered Saturday night dances in the 1930's—when girls with long black hair swung their accordion-pleated skirts toward and away from thin sailor suits of the coast guardmen from the lighthouse station. And over them flickered little spectrum rainbows as the chandelier turned and the Hawaiian guitar rippled. Steve had stood sucking softly on the straws of his coke on the edge of the floor concentrating on these pleasures of the future before wheeling home.

The last dance in the Grand Typee ballroom, which was really moderate sized and without a single similarity to a wigwam, had been in the summer of 1947. Steve, freshly out of the Air Force, had taken a young war widow from the South who was waiting to find out what to do next. He couldn't remember her face now, but she had had a very good time at the dance and, wanting to repay him, she stroked his neck and shoulders fiercely as he drove her home to her apartment. He never became a very good driver and that night was a clumsy memory. After the summer, the war widow found out what to do and moved away from the sea where her husband's body had disappeared. With her went her little girl—Steve had liked the kid—and they never had another dance in the Grand Typee ballroom.

"It's the kind of town," he often said to Ginny, "you wish you didn't live in, so you could visit it. When you're born into it, where's there to go?"

She nodded. What else could you say? And in five years of almost every Wednesday and some Sundays, they'd improvised on what they had to say until the topics were threadbare and no new skein of talk could lighten the pattern or patch the holes. Perhaps they had not talked that much and had only had so much chance to think before and during conversations and so much time to review them afterwards, a dialogue went on in their heads day after day. She knew the name of Steve's third grade teacher—Elaine Grassi Igoe—and about the Christmas his father had gotten five watches at one

time and wore all of them and the grand doings of his service buddy, Fish Dunlop, who still drank a fifth of Old Crow every day and a half and the way his grandfather, a union organizer, had looked when the heart attack grabbed him—about to push a company truck loaded with cotton bales into the Merrimack in February of 1934. He had all her stories, her relatives, her failures, in his head, and except that the silences were too hard to take, they would have walked speechless through their Wednesday and Sunday nights.

"What do you talk about with Tim?" she asked her sister one night over the dishes. But her sister, long married, had looked up from scrubbing the broiler and waited for her to smile as if it were a joke. No answer. After that, she took to listening for a few weeks to the conversations of her married friends. Not all of them talked all the time, but what they said was about their children and their children's sicknesses or teachers or cars and vacations. They seldom mentioned their youth, which was mostly what she talked about with Steve. Ginny supposed that marriage gave them new topics—enough to last ten years or so and new things to do when the conversation wouldn't run.

Wednesday nights had fewer silences. At five o'clock she went into the relief room and put on new lipstick and her suede pumps and then waited in the parking lot. This avoided his going through the reception line in her living room. Her father thwacking his evening *Traveler* with his one good hand and croaking, "You look like a damn Christmas tree on stilts." Her mother's "Have a nice time, dear," as if they were all caught up in an Andy Hardy movie or maybe one of those comic strips where for twenty years nobody gets a day older.

Anyway, the living room, more than the rest of that house, was an old battlefield, and it could never mean the same thing to a sight-seer, even the veteran of an almost identical one. So they met in the neutral scene of the company parking lot and drove back slowly to the Stop and Shop in Beale Square, where they got out. Anybody seeing them would have thought they were late shoppers, getting a bottle of milk for morning coffee. For Steve, who had managed the Beale Square Supermarket for six years, closing time was very much like church.

He stood beside the door unlocking it as each stacker and checker took off his apron, hung it on a hook in the back closet, and shrugged himself into the unfamiliar coat. "Night, Joe, Ed, Frank, Bud. Night, Mr. Cote." Steve would never be on first name basis with the butcher, Mr. Cote, a long-faced aristocrat. Most butchers are prima donnas, and good ones like Cote deserved respect. The door was automatic, but Steve held it open anyway for Cote, who, like a captain, waited for everyone else to leave.

Behind, the music now silent, Ginny walked up and down between towers of cans under the faint whine of neon lights. The raw materials of eating mystified her, the choices of size and substance and color, the casual tone of cookbooks, no comfort in a frenzied kitchen. She had never made a whole meal in her life; the kitchen was her mother's as clearly as if the range were padlocked against intruders. Any interest in cooking that Ginny might have owned had withered and died. Once in the summer

at a beach picnic for the store, she sat watching Steve confidently season and broil a mound of steaks. She had been frozen by the fear someone would ask her to toss a salad, and she would drop the lettuce in the sand. But no one asked her to do anything, and their not asking made her sick. She was often sick. "You get your bad stomach from your father," her mother said. The only kind of food she liked was what you got at drugstore counters.

Steve drove the scattered pushcarts into each other. He was pleased with their two neat rows, not so happy about the clumps of unsold bread and the fat African violets that refused to bloom and sell themselves. Until the last he saved the rolls of sales slips from the cash registers. He lifted them carefully off the machines and locked them into the safe in the glassed-in square he called his office to look at first thing in the morning. Then he remembered Ginny and found her staring into a bin of frozen turkey pies.

"Have you ever had one?" she asked.

"Never." He was shocked she thought his mother capable of that.

"How can they be sure that 25 minutes at 350 degrees does the trick?"

"It's all worked out. Somebody in a big kitchen in St. Paul or Grand Rapids decides all the frozen turkey pies in America need 25 minutes. Like the cake mixes."

There were a good many Wednesday nights when she would rather have gone right home from work and he would rather have stayed in the store adding up the sales slips, but they always went to the Miter for drinks and dinner. They had three martinis and listened to Honey Holman, a nice girl with a long neck, play "When the Red, Red Robin Comes Bob, Bob, Bobbing Along," on the Hammond organ. The Miter served hot hors d'oeuvres which tasted exactly like the dinner, so it was hard to know when the dinner began or ended. They knew everybody at the Miter—the waitresses, Sam Rosten, who owned it, Honey Holman, and a lot of the salesmen who stayed in the hotel above. Steve usually invited some of them to have a cordial at his table after dinner, so there was plenty of talk there and enough afterward in the car going home.

The rest of the week after work she went bowling and took her nieces and nephews to get new shoes, or wrote letters, or found relatives for her mother to visit. He played the drums in a very good marching band that rehearsed twice a week and made a number of appearances on weekends. One of the big network shows had them on TV, and *Life* had done a piece on them.

On Sundays, usually, they went to the movies and had dinner at the Four Elms, skipping the drinks. Without mentioning where they were going, but with everyone knowing, they edged out of their houses on discreet excuses about meeting friends, ransoming the evening with elaborate promises of being back soon, which they would be. Sundays were never as good as Wednesdays. On the crest of the week of work, they rolled through Wednesdays. On Sundays they met like strangers, kept their masks glued on, and left gratefully when the time was up. Sometimes when there were band concerts or leaves to be raked, they skipped the Sundays entirely. On a couple of those nights, one of them might drive

across the city and peek through the window at the other, sitting in the living room in front of the TV set, and return home.

So this October Sunday she had thrown a wrench into the schedule by coming in the middle of the leaf raking. But the cost of driving up to his house seemed to her to offset her intrusion.

When he got out of his car, she saw that he had changed. At a certain age, people stop wearing their clothes and allow the clothes to take over. Ginny knew his suits all hung in his closet with his shape still in them, as the arms of her dresses rested against the stiff arms of others.

They walked along the boardwalk, she on tiptoe to keep her heels from being caught in the holes; he thought women on Sunday wore heels. She was careful to hold her arm rigid so that the charm bracelet wouldn't rattle. They had given each other every gift they could think of, and he had settled on the bracelet to which he kept adding charms. It was a very heavy bracelet. It had a motorcycle with movable wheels, a telephone with moving dial, a tennis racket, a Christmas tree, a replica of the Miss America statue, and one each of most of the animals in the Ark.

The movie theater had been built at the same time as the Grand Typee ballroom. Its ceiling wore irregular rows of bulbs between other rows of thick-necked cherubs. On both side walls, paintings of tall austere women who might have been Indian or Greek raised orange torches.

"This is supposed to be good," Steve said. "It got four stars. The *Post* had an article about it. They filmed it in Spain, but it really happened in Nebraska."

"Who goes to find out how many stars to give it?" She was looking around the shattered and scuffed seats before the lights went out. They were the two oldest people there. Everybody else was the child of somebody Steve had gone to high school with. Ginny watched them attempting to knot their supple arms around each other and noticed how they lost hold and slipped away and then wrestled back trying to find a comfortable embrace. The lights went out.

The movie was about two couples who spent a great deal of time in the kitchen of one set. The two couples were learning they had married the wrong people. One husband and the other wife could have managed very well, but the second wife, miserable with her husband's silence and their bills and his drinking, went crying into the night and was blinded by a speeding car and killed in the rain. Her husband, guilty and unshaven, sat with the other couple in their kitchen patching things up. This is where the movie left them, over a large meal, in the dark kitchen, their children growing up around them.

"I don't know why they have to be like that," Steve said on the way out.

"Like what?" Ginny asked, although she had wondered too.

"All full of misery. God knows, the people I know aren't like that."

"Probably. It all works out in the end anyway, doesn't it?"

"I suppose."

Without two cars they would never have managed the five years of twice a week. Now he solemnly opened her door and helped her in and patted her on the shoulder; then like a little parade, they drove away toward dinner.

The Four Elms had once been a speakeasy. Then it became a family

restaurant. Behind it was a pond in which a family of ducks swam waiting for a dinner. In front of it were the two remaining elms and a parking lot full of Buicks. All day Sunday, families waited in line for free tables, all the men turning their hat brims round and round in their hands, their wives, who wore little furs over their silk dresses, talking to each other. The children and grandchildren threw stones at the ducks. When the tables were free, they took off their overcoats and hung up their furs, read through the menu, and ordered the day's special, which for Sunday was veal cutlets and spaghetti. It was, as Steve often said, a place that gave you a good value for your money. And these people were good eaters; they had all been to church that morning and had taken the whole family for a drive up to Point of Firs. They had put on their best clothes, listened with worry to the sermon, given enough to the two collections, observed the speed laws, bought frozen custard for the children, and now they were eating the day's special.

Steve and Ginny pushed themselves up the waiting bench, speaking to men from the store and women from her office. When the waiter asked, "What'll it be, Steve?" he answered, "Two cutlets and bring me a beer and the little lady a coke." Which he did. They ate slowly, talking about the movie, remaking the lives of the characters so that they would not have been killed and orphaned. Their benches were set back to back with other couples. Behind Steve's, Ginny saw an almost identical head, gray in the same spots, heavy jawed. At her back she heard a voice encouraging children to eat everything on their plates and a bracelet jangling as it rose and fell.

Always when it was over, they waited after the dessert as if something was going to happen. Then Steve collected his change and they said goodnight to everybody they would see in the morning. In the parking lot he unlocked her car, held the door open, and patted her shoulder again.

"Wednesday, huh," he said.

She hesitated a moment and said, "Sure—Wednesday."

Whir

• **Martha Haskins Hume**

Brightness lashes the air—
now all is still:
a loud of darkness,
a proud of shadow.
A scarlet whir
of hummingbird,
a whiff of almond, myrrh.
Between the beat and blur
of wing and light,
does God stir,
or is it shadow?

Contributors

JOHN F. HOPKINS has been writing for more than twenty years and has had his work published in several magazines; at present he is working on the revision of a short story and has finished a first draft of a short novel. He is head of the fiction department of the Free Library of Philadelphia. ROBERT BLOOM has written poetry for *Massachusetts Review* and *Ramparts;* he lives in New York. SAMUEL HYNES is the author of *The Pattern of Hardy's Poetry* and several books on literary criticism, and is a regular contributor to *Commonweal, The Yale Review,* and *The Sewanee Review.* He teaches at Swarthmore College. EMILIE GLEN lives in New York and has been writing and publishing for many years, both stories and poems. JOHN JUDSON has had his work published in *Chicago Choice, The Literary Review,* and *The New York Times;* his first book will appear in the spring of 1964. He teaches in Coburn Classical Institute, Waterville, Maine. VICTOR CHAPIN, another New York writer, has recently sold his fourth story to *Cosmopolitan.* From Boulder, Colorado, MARTHA HASKINS HUME writes: "I am a musician and writer and have been teaching English for the last two years at the University and have had my work published in *PS, Quixote,* and *Sparrow 17,* 'little' magazines." NANCY A. J. POTTER teaches American literature at the University of Rhode Island and recently had her "One Rich Friend," a short story, accepted by *The Yale Review.* CLAUDE F. KOCH, associate professor of English at La Salle College, will have his third novel, *Kite in the Sea,* published in the spring of 1964. The fictional narrative in this issue of **four quarters** is a chapter from this novel.

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